



On the road

Battery-powered wanderlust lifestyle helps recharge spirit, self and stuff

“Live, travel, adventure, bless, and don’t be sorry.”

—Jack Kerouac, “On the Road”

By Robert Snarski

The first time Adam Platt enjoyed a taste of freedom — “a true taste of freedom, like no constraints,” he says — he was 8 years old.

“I ran away from home for about an hour,” says the former building material sales representative. “My dad was a writer, and he had rented a house near Willard Beach in Maine one summer when we were kids. We were from Ventura, Calif., and I knew we lived by a beach, like the one in Maine. I was upset one day with my mom, so I figured I could walk down Willard Beach and get to our beach.”

A short time later, he turned back. Although it was a brief adventure, Platt, 34, says something “opened up inside” of him.

“I really can’t explain it, but to this day,

I remember that feeling of absolute exhilaration,” he says. “Seeing nothing behind me but beach and nothing in front of me but beach — I felt like I was in a movie.”

Fast-forward about 20 years, and Platt’s life was still like a movie, but “one of those ones where a man finds himself in a horrible life and decides to lash out at society,” he says.

So, Platt gave his two-week notice at work, subleased his apartment in Portland, Ore., and decided to go on “an open-ended road trip.” That was six years ago.

The great escape

When he began his journey, Platt loaded his Ford Escape with everything he thought he’d need for a month.

“I knew I couldn’t live like this forever in parking lots and at rest stops,” he says.

“When you work at a certain job and have a certain lifestyle, it’s hard to just walk away from that, so I made a deal with myself — six months on and six months off. Work for six months, save enough to go on a trip, travel for six months and then find a place to work until you can afford to take the next leg of the journey.”

Platt says his travel timeline expanded after his father died in 2014.

“My father was not a prominent author by any means, but the little money that he did make and the money that he had inherited from his family had been wisely invested, so when he died, there was a substantial amount of money,” Platt says. “Since I’m an only child, that money went to me.”

Platt says he invested a portion of the funds for his retirement — although he admits “retirement” is a relative term when you spend the bulk of your year roaming the continent — and decided to upgrade a bit. He purchased a new Jeep and several rechargeable devices, and he invested in a small auto shop in his adopted hometown of Portland.

“I know pretty much nothing about cars, but I helped set it up and got it running,” he says. “That’s how I make my living now.”

Lithium life

Platt says he has simplified his life to the point that he no longer carries a laptop or a cellphone. He has rechargeable lights, an MP3 player, a battery-powered TV and several other lithium-battery-powered devices.

Platt says people likely would be surprised at the various mindsets and lifestyles of a lot of people who travel.

“The nomadic lifestyle isn’t exactly synonymous with dirty hippie or anti-establishment socialist, not at all,” he says. “There are people with a lot of money who decided to take a break from society for a few months. ... It’s a little piece of connection with America.”

Jane Gomez, who is traveling with her husband and 2-year-old son on a one-year coast-to-coast trip, agrees.

“We see families, retired couples, singles, siblings — any combination you can think of,” says the 24-year-old Iowa City, Iowa, resident. “It’s a mix of all cultures





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Still, Gomez says she does find one commonality with her fellow travelers.

“I think we’re all people who really appreciate nature and appreciate each other,” she says. “Sometimes I look up at the stars at night and think about how sad I’m going to be when I get back to Iowa and have to go to work. ... I hope I can find a way to keep this magical essence inside of me even if I’m out living in the suburbs somewhere.”

These modern wanderers often rely on devices powered by lithium-ion batteries that make living easier and keep them connected to the world. Living away from the rat race is often possible because of battery-powered devices.

Portable solar panels, head lamps, flashlights, water purifiers, hand warmers, camp stoves, power banks, charger kits, generators, water heaters, fans, coffee makers and more can keep nomads going as they’re connecting with nature and reducing their reliance on the grid.

More time with nature

“Rechargeable batteries have opened up camping in new and exciting ways,”

says Luiz Benitez, director of the Colorado Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry.

“They’ve allowed families, couples and individuals to spend a little more time with nature. We don’t have to do without some of the small but important items we count on to help get us through our day-to-day lives just because we want to spend more time outdoors.”

Pittsburgh resident Anna Rinella agrees. A mother of three children, Rinella says she and her husband camp with their twin 6-year-old sons and 9-year-old daughter far differently than she used to camp with her father.

“When I was a kid, we roughed it — I mean, really roughed it — and it turned my sister and brother off from camping for a long time,” Rinella says. “I always liked it, but I was a bit of a tomboy, so catching fish for breakfast was exciting for me. All of it was. I was the kind of kid who thought it was hilarious to dig a hole in the forest and use it as a bathroom.”

It’s important for Rinella to give her children the best of camping.

“It gets dark when we camp, obviously, and that used to terrify me as a kid so I make sure we have lanterns and night-

lights so there’s always some light, so having things that run on rechargeable batteries make a big difference,” Rinella says. “My kids can go stare at the stars and we can sit around a campfire and I don’t necessarily mind if they want to play on my phone for 15 minutes before they go to bed.”

Rinella says her kids also love using rechargeable portable fans and head lamps. And Rinella herself also admits she likes some of the comforts from home while she’s sleeping under the stars.

“I have a portable espresso machine,” she says. “Yes, that sounds pretentious — camping with an espresso machine. We have a portable coffee machine, too, a one-cup coffee maker. So, I have my coffee in the morning and then a shot of espresso with lunch or dinner. ... My husband makes fun of it and says my dad would roll over in his grave if he saw me drinking espresso after cooking steaks on the fire, but he’d probably love it.”

Benitez says that comforts like Rinella’s espresso maker, which is powered by a lithium-ion battery, is why many newbies try camping.

“There are people who love roughing it,

who can go out with minimal equipment and enjoy the experience, but that's not for everyone," he says. "It's entirely possible to enjoy some of the comforts from home and still have an amazing, outdoor experience. The setting is what matters to most people, not the logistics."

See the world

Matthew Kepnes, founder of NomadicMatt.com and author of "How to Travel the World on \$50 a Day: Travel Cheaper, Longer, Smarter," says traveling — especially map-your-own-journey traveling — isn't just for people looking to disconnect from society for a while. In fact, he says, it's a great learning experience for people of all ages, including new college graduates before they embark on their careers.

"For a lot of people, once you're out of school, you're going to work until you're dead, so why not go have some fun while you're young?" Kepnes says. "When you're 50 and you have four kids, you can't just quit your job and travel. When you're 22, you can say, 'I'm going to go have fun for a little bit.'"

Kepnes says young travelers are sure to pick up life skills while traveling around the globe.

"You learn to go with the flow and deal with situations," he says. "You learn how to talk to people from different cultures. You learn things you can't learn in school. You become a more well-rounded person."

Have batteries, will travel

Platt doubts he'd be able to take his long excursions if there weren't portable versions of his favorite items available.

"Everything's rechargeable: rechargeable lights, rechargeable MP3 player, rechargeable power for my TV and Roku — I'm not anti-technology, just anti-being-bothered-by-people-for-no-reason," he says, further explaining his no-phone-or-laptop position. "I have a rechargeable blender and a rechargeable water purifier. I have a couple of rechargeable flashlights and a rechargeable hot-water heater I use for showers."

When he first went on the road, Platt relied on campsites with electrical hookups. Then he "graduated" to a jerry-rigged car battery he used to power

devices like his electric shaver and hot plate.

"Really, it probably was incredibly dangerous," he says. "I remember one time I was shaving and it was hooked up to this battery, and the shaver started to get really hot ... and I started smelling burning metal. I unhooked the shaver and ditched it and the battery at a truck stop along I-80 in Nebraska. When I got back to Portland a few weeks later, I had this ZZ Top beard."

He opts for safety now.

"I'm pretty sure there's a rechargeable version of anything you would ever need to live a nomadic lifestyle."

Safety first


Before clicking "purchase" on the cheapest item, consumers should be sure they're getting more than just a good price.

"It's easy to buy things that may be dangerous. You see something that's less expensive than similar items and it draws you in," says Matthew Thomas, senior engineering technician at UL's testing lab in Northbrook, Ill. "As a consumer, though, you have to make sure you're buying from a legitimate manufacturer and that the product you're buying has been tested."

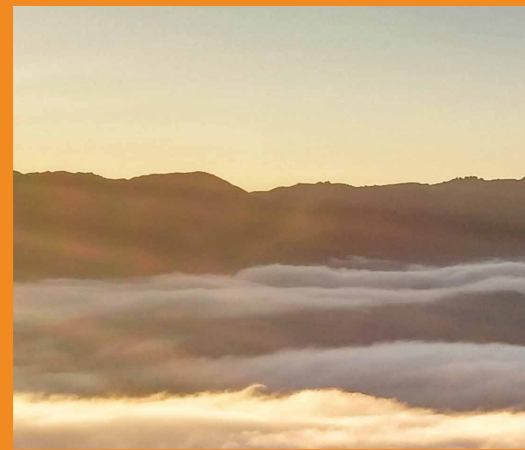
Thomas and other members of his team take the batteries through a litany of tests, making sure the batteries and cells can handle heat, pressure, drops and other rough-and-tumble elements of portable flashlights, phones, coffee makers and more.

"We replicate what could happen in real-life situations," says Thomas. "Anything left in the sun could overheat, so we test for that. Anything can be dropped or can fall off a shelf or table, so we test for that. We want to make sure the batteries that bear the UL Mark adhere to the standards."

In addition to having the right gear and devices, Platt says the right expectations are important for such a lifestyle.

"It helps being a loner," Platt says, "but make sure you define that like I do: a person who enjoys his alone time, not a person who hates everyone." 

—Robert Snarski is a freelance contributor



Packing list

If you want to enjoy life off the grid, grab the right gear

By Marco Buscaglia

NO, THAT DOG-EARED COPY of "On the Road" by Jack Kerouac isn't going to help you survive life off the grid for a few months. Let's face it: Even a few hours without some of life's necessities can be pretty taxing, no matter how much you want to be one with the earth.

Thanks to the marvels of rechargeable lithium-ion batteries, there are numerous options if you're looking to gear up before hitting the road. Here are some suggestions:



Let there be light

A solar-powered flashlight and a solar-powered lantern — or a combination of the two — are camping essentials. Not only will you use them to find your way back after that midnight trip to the bathroom, you can plant one on a table so no one accidentally knocks over the bowl of chips and hand-crafted guacamole. And really, what else are you going to use to make scary faces at your kids when it's pitch black outside?



Voices from beyond

While the chances of things going wrong when you're off the grid depend on your setting, your circumstances and your luck, it's always smart to plan for the worst — and to know when the worst is coming. Look for a multi-purpose radio, which includes a flashlight, phone charger and AM/FM/WB radio. You'll be able to keep track of pending thunderstorms and the Cubs' winning streak while doing the environment some good.



Heading out

There are headlamps that throw off 300 lumens of bright light and are Bluetooth-friendly, which means you can customize your beam of energy with an app. Why would you do that, you ask? By adjusting the app, you can set a certain distance to illuminate or control the strength of the beam, depending on your remaining battery power.



Drink up

Challenging the voice in your head that asks, "You're not going to drink that, are you?" can be a bad idea. Use a water purifier instead. Look for a purification process that involves ultraviolet technology to cleanse the water and a unique reservoir system to speed the process.



Charging ahead

Harness the power of the sun, or something like that, with a weatherproof phone and tablet re-charger that gains a full charge from the sun. They can help you stay charged in potentially dangerous situations when you really need to make a call while in the wild.

—Marco Buscaglia is a freelance contributor

